



Preschool for All: Meeting the Educational Needs of an Increasingly Diverse California

California's efforts to establish a system of voluntary, high-quality preschools that can serve all of our young children and families at no cost are well underway. State and local partners including First 5 California,

County First 5 Commissions, the Packard Foundation, and others, have committed major funding for a range of Preschool for All demonstration projects and countywide plans. At the same time, carrying forward the intent of the California Master Plan for Education, legislators and other policy-makers are working to specify the long-range program parameters that will define Preschool for All once it is fully implemented statewide as a part of the California K-12 system.

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At the heart of all this planning is the awareness that it is not enough simply to expand our current preschool systems. In order for today's extremely diverse and largely low-income young learners and their families to succeed, California's

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approach to preschool must also change in fundamental ways. Here we take a closer look at some of the critical issues that must be addressed as we move forward on behalf of our youngest Californians, and how local practitioners are stepping up to the challenge.

Who are we serving? The new demographics of early childhood in California

The three- and four-year-olds who will be served by Preschool for All are part of a 0 to 5 state population that is the largest and most ethnically diverse in the nation. Nearly half of these children are Latino; less than one third are white. Nine percent are Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA), six percent are African-American, and about five percent are from multiracial, Native American/Alaskan Native, or other backgrounds. Over one third of the parents of young Californians are foreign born, and almost 40 percent of these have not finished high school.

Reflecting their families' foreign backgrounds, many of our prospective preschoolers

speak a language other than English at home. Statewide, California Department

of Education (CDE) data show that 38 percent of entering kindergartners were English language learners in 2002-03, and that percentage is likely increasing. While the great majority of these children speak Spanish, significant numbers also speak Vietnamese, Hmong, Cantonese, Tagalog, and 51 other languages recorded by CDE in 2002-03. At the low-performing schools that will be first to be targeted for Preschool for All, 48 percent of the students are English language learners.

Though California's young children come from a wide range

of economic circumstances, as a group they are disproportionately low-income, despite the fact that most families with young children in California have at least one working parent. Among families with children at low-performing schools, 85 percent are low income; statewide, one young child in three is living in poverty. California's child poverty rate is the highest in the nation.

California's young children also span a wide range of abilities and special needs. In a study conducted for First 5 California by UCLA in 2001, about four percent of parents reported that their child had an emotional, behavioral, or developmental problem for which she or he needed treatment or counseling. Six percent of parents reported a functional impairment or disability, and eight percent said their child had a chronic health problem expected to last 12 months or more. Families of children with functional impairments or disabilities were found to be disproportionately low-income.¹

The demand for preschool among Californians of all backgrounds

An extensive body of research suggests that as a group, these young Californians are poised to reap significant benefits from high-quality early education and preschool. But fewer than half of California's three-to-five-year-olds are in public or private preschool, and among households in poverty, only one child in ten is enrolled.

These relatively low levels of preschool enrollment among California families, we now know, reflect not lack of demand but lack of access. First 5 California's most recent public opinion study, conducted by Hart Research Associates

in December 2003, shows that a majority of Californians, including large majorities of Latinos and African Americans, believe that prekindergarten education is important for their children - more important than staying at home with a parent. But respondents of all backgrounds pointed to high costs as a major barrier, with Latinos also frequently citing a lack of information.

Most Californians rated school readiness as a higher priority than tax reduction, and 60 percent of all respondents went so far as to say that the state should offer organized education to all, starting at age four or younger. Eighty-three percent of parents of children four years old and younger say that if free, voluntary preschool were universally available in California today, they would enroll their children in it.²

The three- and four-year-olds who will be served by Preschool for All are part of a 0-5 state population that is the largest and most ethnically diverse in the nation.

Effective preschool for diverse youngsters: research and practice

With California families of all backgrounds now standing ready to enroll their children in preschool, the challenge for state and local First 5 partners is to design a system of high-quality programs that respond fully to their educational and practical needs. But in the context of the enormous variation among California's young children and families in language, culture, economic circumstance, and abilities, what does "high quality" mean?

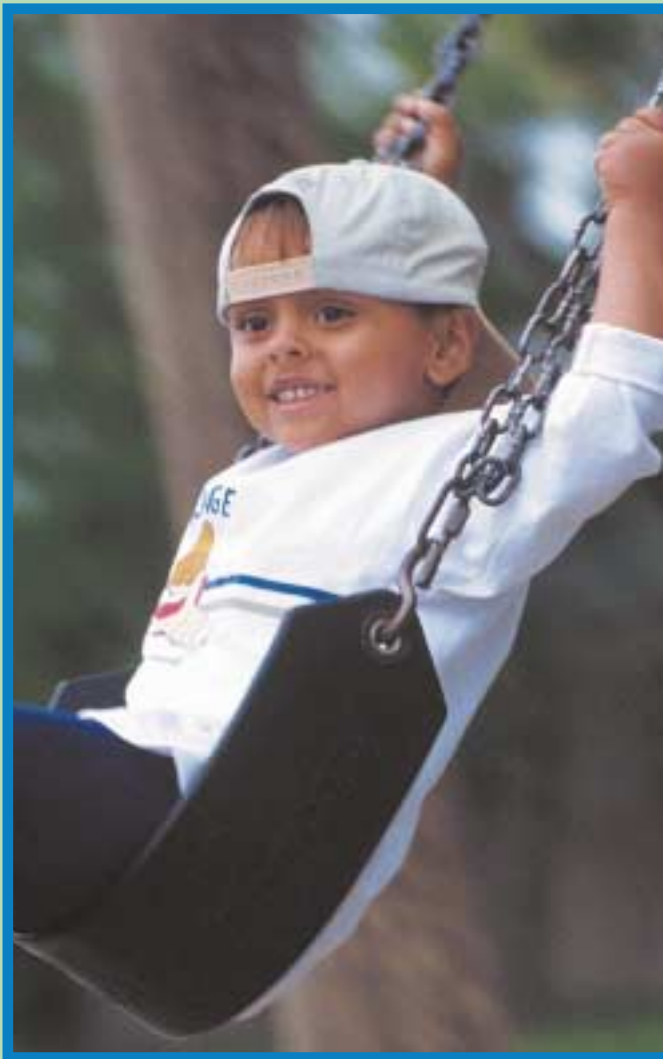
Quality for all children.

As discussed in previous issues of *Building Blocks*, researchers have identified several key dimensions of high quality in preschool. While these are important for all children and families, they take on additional meaning for low-income and English language learner families, who have been shown to be most affected by the quality of their experience.

Researchers generally agree that in effective preschools, all children experience warm, nurturing, and communicative relationships with their teachers, in settings that are well-equipped with learning materials and toys. Teachers encourage mutual listening, talking and responding throughout the day, and encourage children to use reasoning and problem-solving. Children have daily opportunities for art, music/movement, dramatic play, science, math, sand and water play, and other physical activity. Teachers use materials and activities to promote understanding and acceptance of diversity. Parents participate in all aspects of the program.

Preschools' capacity to offer such experiences is closely associated with certain structural characteristics. Of these, a well-qualified and well-compensated teaching staff is the most important. Teachers in turn are empowered to do their best work when group sizes are small and the ratio of adults to children does not exceed 2:20; when curriculum fosters emerging literacy and numeracy; and when staff receive effective supervision, evaluation, and professional development.

So that children don't lose the gains they have made in preschool during the summer, access to full-year programming is also important, while a full-day schedule or linkages to full-day services can be essential to families' participation.³



Delving further into quality for diverse populations.

While all these attributes form an agreed-upon general framework of quality for young children, the particulars of how they are put into practice make a big difference for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and for those with special needs.

The importance of cultural acceptance and continuity. Because virtually all aspects of young children's learning and development are rooted in cultural patterns, cultural continuity and acceptance are the preconditions for high-quality

early learning in preschool. For parents, a welcoming environment that is culturally sensitive, or the lack of it, can make the difference in their ability or willingness to engage in their child's program, or even to enroll. For children, an atmosphere of cultural celebration and respect for differences helps them build on and value the unique experiences they bring with them to preschool, which contributes to a positive self-concept and later success. Particularly since so many of California's young children are low-income, including many white children, a social and physical preschool environment that conveys respect for them and their families can send a powerful message of new possibilities.

Linguistic continuity and dual language learning.

Culture and language are closely intertwined, and continuity of language between home and the prekindergarten environment is especially important not only in sustaining family participation but also in the critically important developmental task of language acquisition. In gaining language as a tool for formulating thoughts and expressing their developing feelings and ideas, young children lay the foundation for success in all later learning tasks, including learning to read and write, and acquiring a second language.

The essential nature of language development is the same regardless of the language involved, and contributes to brain development in fundamental ways. Although language and literacy strategies in California preschools today range widely, from English-only to fully bilingual or monolingual non-English approaches, researchers increasingly agree that well-delivered bilingual programs not only help children sustain their home language development but actually can accelerate their language development in general over their peers in monolingual programs. When children already have a strong foundation in Spanish, for example, the addition of English as a second language promotes further brain development, leading to enhanced language

Governors Convene to Discuss Quality Preschool

As First 5 California continues to move forward in establishing its Preschool for All initiative, similar strides are being made in other states. Throughout the nation, the Preschool for All movement is building momentum. This sustained national interest in early childhood development and universal access to quality preschool recently spurred a prestigious two-day conference, *Governors' Forum on Quality Preschool*, convened by the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices and hosted by Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida. The conference was held on Dec. 15-16, 2003 in Orlando, Florida and focused on the opportunities and challenges state leaders face in promoting high-quality learning experiences for young children.

More than ever, high-quality preschool programs are seen as a proven way to narrow the achievement gap. The Forum was a unique occasion for governors and representatives from their cabinets to discuss the opportunities and challenges they face in promoting high-quality learning experiences for young children. This is an increasingly important issue given that many states are challenged with serving increasingly diverse populations and addressing the educational needs of children from the entire spectrum of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

As evidenced by Forum participants, enthusiasm for early childhood education has been bolstered by bipar-

tisan support. Attending governors included Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida, Gov. Jim Doyle of Wisconsin, Gov. Jennifer Granholm of Michigan, Gov. Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho and Gov. Judy Martz of Montana. The participating governors were joined by 23 state teams, including first ladies, lieutenant governors, governors' education policy advisors, state superintendents of education, state health and human services commissioners, state legislators and foundation and business leaders.

Over the course of the two-day conference leaders from diverse states aired their shared concerns in a series of wide-ranging symposiums. Areas of interest included: How do we pay for quality universal preschool programs and build the infrastructure? How do we ensure programs are high-quality and meet the needs of diverse children? How do we engage the public on this issue?

The opening session featured a Governors' Roundtable with experts from the education, research, business and policy communities. Among key findings of the roundtable were:

- Establishing quality preschool as a state priority relies heavily on gubernatorial leadership.
- Building public and political will is necessary for increasing investments in quality preschool.
- Measuring the impact of quality programs is critical to building support and creating a sense of urgency around this issue.
- Defining quality is important. The definition of quality should include qualified teachers, research-based curriculum, small class sizes, appropriate evaluation/accountability measures and a supportive infrastructure.

Presenters from California Discussed the State's Progress and Unique Challenges

First 5 California's Executive Director Jane Henderson was among a cadre of influential national early childhood development

"...Greatness by far has its best chance to emerge from classrooms whose students get off to a strong start in school. What I do know is that the wisest path to public education 'reform' would be time and money on the front end of the lives of children from before birth to age 5. I came to have the evidence that the economic well-being, indeed the very future of each of our states literally depends on children getting off to a strong start in life."

—David Lawrence, Jr., President,
Early Childhood Initiative Foundation

experts presenting on policy strategies that can help make quality Preschool for All a reality. Dr. Henderson participated in the *Preschool in an Era of Diversity* panel alongside other nationally recognized experts in the field, including Antonia Lopez, Director of Early Care and Education for the National Council of La Raza; Linda Espinosa, Associate Professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia; and Evelyn Moore, President of the National Black Child Development Institute. The panel discussion addressed topics including teacher training and cultural competency, the importance of a diverse workforce and dual-language acquisition for children who speak more than one language.

According to Dr. Henderson, "There is much interest in how to address the ever-



changing ethnic, cultural and linguistic fabric of our schools and communities. California's experience in its unparalleled diversity can offer many lessons. We consider the availability and accessibility of quality preschool fundamental to the educational achievement of children from all backgrounds."

Additional participants from California included Deborah J. Stipek, Dean of the Stanford University School of Education, who participated in a session that addressed aligning the goals of preschool and K-12 education, and Marcy Whitebook, Director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, who participated in a panel discussion on workforce issues. Both California-based experts discussed the key components that high-quality preschool programs share, including college-educated teachers, small class and group sizes and age-appropriate curriculum linked to K-12 standards. Governors and other state leaders were encouraged to design policies to promote these essential elements.

While much discussion at the Forum centered around what can be done to improve the availability and accessibility of quality preschool at the state level, many of the priorities identified also can be applied to assist those working at the county and school district-levels in California. Among the most important:

- **Cultivate influential leadership.** With support from state and local leaders, states can pursue strategies to ensure that preschool programs better meet the needs of all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- **Create and foster partnerships at all levels.** Quality preschool programs depend on the efforts of state, local, and community leaders and stakeholders from the public and private sectors.
- **Maximize and coordinate funds that can support preschool.** Even in tight fiscal times, state and local leaders can consider how to make better use of existing funds, maximize available federal funding and identify ways to leverage additional private dollars.
- **Develop policies that guide quality improvement.** State policies can encourage or require key quality components, such as teacher education and smaller class sizes.

Maintaining Momentum for Quality Preschool

State leaders are critical to the development and promotion of a vision for early learning that includes preschool. Collaboration among parents, educators, policy-makers and the business and foundation communities is also crucial. Together, these efforts will continue to focus attention on the importance of early childhood education for every child as it relates to large-scale educational reforms.

The NGA Center for Best Practices will be following up with states that attended the Forum to offer guidance and assistance as they move forward on their early learning plans. Details on the meeting are available on the NGA Web site: (http://www.nga.org/center/topics/1,1188,D_1480,00.html), including briefing papers, speaker biographies and the remarks and presentation slides from more than 20 presenters. For more information on other states' quality preschool initiatives, see Volume 2, Issue 2 and Volume 2, Issue 4 of *Building Blocks*. ■

The Forum included the following keynote speeches and panel presentations:

The Case for Quality Preschool: It Can Be Done

David Lawrence, Jr., President, Early Childhood Initiative Foundation
Former Publisher, Miami Herald and Detroit Free Press

The Role of State Leaders in Defining Quality Preschool

Moderator: Sue Urahn, Director, Knowledge Resources and Education Program, The Pew Charitable Trusts
Toni Jennings, Lieutenant Governor of Florida
Tom D. Watkins, Jr., Superintendent of Education, State of Michigan

The Economic Development Case for Preschool

Arthur J. Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis

State Strategies for Financing Quality Preschool

Moderator: Anne Mitchell, Early Childhood Policy Research
Elizabeth Burmaster, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Wisconsin
Jerry Stermer, President, Voices for Illinois Children

Preschool in an Era of Diversity

Moderator: Antonia Lopez, Director of Early Care and Education, National Council of La Raza
Linda Espinosa, Associate Professor, University of Missouri-Columbia
Jane Henderson, Executive Director, First 5 California
Evelyn Moore, President, National Black Child Development Institute

Engaging New Voices to Promote Quality Preschool

Moderator: Sanford Newman, Executive Director, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Sheriff Michael Carona, Orange County, California
Rob Mosbacher, President, Mosbacher Energy Company
George Askew, Executive Director, Docs for Tots

Preschool as an Economic Development Strategy

Moderator: Charles Kolb, President, and Committee for Economic Development
W. Steven Barnett, Director, National Institute for Early Education Research
Arthur J. Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
Susan Pareigis, Director, Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation

Defining the CEO's Role in Promoting a Preschool Agenda

Rob Mosbacher, President, Mosbacher Energy Company

Public Engagement and Communications Strategies

Moderator: Joan Benso, President and CEO, Pennsylvania Partnership for Children
Christopher Blunt, President, Overbrook Research
Joshua Ulibarri, Senior Analyst, Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates
Margaret Blood, President, Strategies for Children/Early Education for All

Toward Early Success: Bridging Policies for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Moderator: Patricia Kempthorne, First Lady, State of Idaho
Joan Lombardi, Director, The Children's Project
Barbara Reisman, Executive Director, The Schumann Fund for New Jersey

First 5 California Commits \$20 Million to Young Children with Special Needs and Disabilities



First 5 California is committed to increasing school readiness for young children by supporting programs that address their complex developmental and learning needs. Guided by the overall vision of school readiness, First 5 California's plans for the future include ambitious initiatives that create a continuum of support for young children and their families. Among these is the First 5 California Special Needs Project, a \$20 million, five-year investment in programs to benefit many of the estimated 124,000 young children in California who have a disability or limitation that can impair their development and readiness for school.

The Special Needs Project was developed by First 5 California after a comprehensive strategic planning process that included focus groups with parents and caregivers of children with special needs and disabilities. At its 10 newly established demonstration sites throughout the state, the Project will test strategies that aim to improve outcomes for children with diverse health, mental health or developmental needs and, in turn, increase their readiness for school. Among the most important elements of the Project are: 1.) To identify children as early as possible and refer them to the appropriate providers for treatment; 2.) To help families navigate the system so that they can take full advantage of the services and support available in their communities; and 3.) To provide training and support for teachers and child care providers so that they can include children with disabilities and special

needs in early learning environments alongside children who do not have special needs.

In addition to raising awareness among parents and caregivers about what it means to have a special need or disability, the Special Needs Project will focus on promoting early identification of conditions that are often overlooked or difficult to diagnose in young children. It will also provide resources to educate the public about the importance of early screening, provide critical prevention and screening services and improve access to intervention services as necessary through new and existing resources.

According to Dr. Louis Vismara, First 5 California commissioner and founding member of the M.I.N.D. Institute at the University of California, Davis, "Early identification is an essential first step toward ensuring that children ages 0 to 5 with special needs get the help they need to grow and learn. By implementing screening tests before children enter school, at least 75 percent of these children could get the help they need in time for it to be most effective."

The Special Needs Project demonstration sites will attempt to identify children with disabilities and special needs as early as possible, enhance their early health and development and assist their families with developing nurturing relationships and supportive learning environments for them. Examples of services to be provided by the sites include:

- Educational outreach to parents and caregivers about the importance of prevention and early intervention
- Universal access to screening services by trained health providers for early identification and diagnosis of special needs and disabilities
- Referrals to address physical and developmental issues as necessary through new and existing programs and resources. For example, sites may assist the family in establishing a medical home for their child to ensure continuity of care or coordinate with other community resources available to the family, such as mental health agencies, Regional Centers or Head Start.

While there is an array of resources available in California to assist parents and support children with a special needs or disability diagnosis, many families are forced to maneuver through a complex and fragmented system of services. The Special Needs Project is designed to address this challenge by coordinating a range of quality screening and intervention services for preschool-age children together in one place and serving families in a more integrated, family-friendly manner. By streamlining accessibility and bridging the gap in quality and availability of services for young children, the Project will address some of the largest hurdles faced by parents and caregivers of children with special needs.

The Special Needs Project will also provide teachers and child care providers with the training and resources they need to include young children with disabilities and other special needs in programs such as child care and preschool alongside children who do not have special needs.

First 5 California approved the Special Needs Project in March 2004. Since then, staff has continued to develop the program, which will allocate up to \$9.5 million over four years to fund the 10 statewide demonstration sites. Local programs funded by the Project will be required to provide equal matching funds.

The Children with Special Needs Project will be implemented through the First 5 California School Readiness Initiative, complementing other First 5 County Commission programs with the goal of meeting the needs of young children with disabilities and special needs. The California Institute for Human Services (CIHS) at Sonoma State University was awarded the coordination and training component of the project in December 2003.

The Request for Funding for the demonstration sites will be developed in early 2004 with input from First 5 California, the Special Needs Project advisory group and CIHS. First 5 California will launch the program in fall 2004 and anticipates that the demonstration sites will be identified and funded by fall 2004.

For more information on this program, please visit ccfc.ca.gov. ■

capacity and earlier literacy skills when compared to monolingual instruction. Bilingual preschoolers who are developing balanced language and literacy skills in both languages have been found to recognize the symbolic function of letters and their relationship to sounds earlier than monolingual children, which accelerates their readiness to read. As bilingual children learn to choose the appropriate language in a given situation, brain development in the area of executive functioning is also enhanced.⁴

Recognizing these advantages, California's Master Plan for Education embraces California's many young English language learners as an educational asset. The Plan calls for all young children to learn English while preserving their home language, with all California children well on their way to being fully bilingual and biliterate by the end of third grade.

Dual language instruction for children, English tutoring for their parents. Effective preschools help children continue their home language development with skilled adults who speak that language, even as they are also learning English. This can be especially important for young children from fragile families who are already vulnerable to language delays. In the mostly Spanish-speaking community served by the National School District's School Readiness Program in San Diego County, for example, two teachers, one speaking Spanish and one speaking English, co-lead each school readiness prekindergarten classroom.



For language activities, the teachers separate the children according to their home language, but then all join together again in mixed-language groups for music and other

activities, snack time, or free play.

While the children are learning English in preschool, many of their parents are also learning English through the Community Based English Tutoring (CBET) program, which offers three-hour classes timed to coincide with preschool or other early care and education for the children four days a week. The program is designed to help parents at all skill levels, from those who are illiterate in their first language to those whose English is strong enough to pursue a G.E.D. In this way parents gain the ability to support their children's language development in both languages.

Promoting language development, literacy, and parent involvement in many languages.

Some of the Elk Grove School District's preschool teachers and instructional assistants are bilingual in Spanish, but the preschools' enormously diverse population of 690 children and families speaks dozens of other languages as well. To increase the preschools' bilingual teaching capacity for a wider range of children, the district has hired six bilingual teaching associates with AA degrees who speak Spanish, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Cantonese, or Hmong. Funded by a federal Early Reading First grant, the associates circulate among the classrooms, working with



the children in direct instruction and connecting non-English-speaking parents more closely to the program through outreach and assistance with parent meetings and conferences.

The whole preschool classroom team, including teachers, instructional assistants, and bilingual teaching associates, is supported by education specialists and instructional coaches who work with them on teaching techniques and effective classroom practice for English language learners and children with special needs. The coaches are funded by the federal grant and the Packard Foundation.

Inclusion for children with disabilities or other special needs. Effective preschools have the capacity to respond to variation not only in children's language and cultural backgrounds but also in their rates of development, physical and mental abilities, and special needs. First 5's approach to Preschool for All emphasizes an inclusive strategy that can support children who are already in the early intervention or special education system as well as the many children struggling with undiagnosed social, emotional, and behavioral challenges as a result of family stress, poor language skills, and/or other issues.

Preschool for All ... continued from page 7

Collaborative "full inclusion" classrooms. In Elk Grove preschools, many Head Start classrooms of 20 students include four or five children with speech and language delays and accompanying behavioral problems, autism, learning disabilities, or physical disabilities requiring significant additional support. The district takes a "full inclusion" approach to serving these children.

In full inclusion classrooms, the Head Start teacher, a special education teacher from the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE), Head Start instructional assistants, speech therapists, nurses, and physical therapists work together as a collaborative team, supported by joint training from SCOE. A School Readiness-funded developmental psychologist from UC Davis also works directly with children and their families at the preschools. The psychologist conducts more specialized developmental assessments for children who already have Individualized Education Plans, as well as for those who do not meet the special education criteria or who are not covered by insurance, thereby filling a previous void.

In these classrooms, all children gain. Parents of typically developing children note that their children learn sensitivity and acceptance, and parents of special needs children are relieved of the isolation they have experienced. Many of the strongest leaders on parent policy committees are parents of special needs children

A multitude of developmental supports and services on-site.

In Riverside County, the Rob Reiner Children and Family Development Center, which serves approximately 500 preschoolers, includes a parent-child center where parents work with children

in early learning/socialization projects three days a week, and a parent training room offering family literacy and ESL, personal development for families, and other classes and services. While children with disabilities and other special needs attend a special day preschool at the site, all prekindergartners in Center programs have access to audiological screening and assessment for speech, language, and hearing delays. The Center also houses an autism pilot program in which parents of children with signs of autism work with professionals to correctly diagnose and support their children.

Engaging and empowering parents. As their children's first teacher, primary provider and decision-maker, and most important advocate, parents are indispensable to the success of Preschool for All. Given the intended reach of Preschool for All, it will be important to find culturally sensitive ways to provide low-income and English language learner parents with the kinds of family supports and services they need to function at their best, and to work with them over time in becoming informed and engaged teaching partners, advocates, and leaders in the educational process.

Inviting families to enroll their children in preschool.

Around the state, preschool programs and School Readiness programs in particular have used a variety of creative strategies in helping families learn about and connect with preschool.

Referred to as parent outreach workers, family advocates, *mentores*, *promotoras*, or by other names, and funded by School Readiness, Title I, local First 5, or other sources, parents or other community members have been hired to reach out to neighborhood families in their own language and help them understand and take advantage of the preschool opportunities available to them. These workers also play a critical role in helping families to meet their other needs for health care, social services or support, and help with practical problems of daily living.

Empowering parents as teachers.

In Contra Costa County's Mt. Diablo Unified School District, parents work as co-teachers in highly popular co-op preschools serving a largely Spanish-speaking community. Participating parents commit one day a week to working in the preschools. In each classroom of 24 children, parents work with children at six different learning stations, with coaching and modeling



from kindergarten teachers who lead the preschools after their regular school day. While the classrooms as a whole are conducted mostly in English, the teachers are bilingual and speak to parents in their language, and conversation between parents and children at the learning stations is primarily in Spanish.

Reaching out to English Language Learner (ELL) parents as leaders. In Elk Grove, parents participate in preschool guidance and leadership at a variety of levels, from monthly Head Start policy group meetings to the Preschool Parent Advisory Committee and the Nurturing Success Advisory Committee of the district's School Readiness initiative, which also includes district staff and partner agencies.

Because English language learner parents are underrepresented on these leadership groups, however, an English Learner Advisory Committee at each school is looking at how to reach out to English language learner families and strengthen their participation as advocates for their children. Concurrently, a district-wide committee is developing a comprehensive set of recommendations for the Elk Grove School Board that will address the needs of English language learner children and their families from prekindergarten all the way through adult education.

Building a strong and diverse early childhood educator (ECE) workforce: challenges and policy directions.

As the examples above make clear, thoughtful outreach, research-based program design, and linkages with a range of supports and services are all key to high-quality preschools for diverse children and families. Ultimately, though, young children's success will depend most of all on the early childhood educators who greet them at the classroom door. For Preschool for All to be effective statewide, it must be led by a large corps of early childhood educators who are highly skilled, well-versed in the multifaceted nature of early development, able to communicate and build nurturing relationships with children and families of all backgrounds and needs, and able to devise individualized strategies to deal with the variations among them.

The need for more diversity, higher education, and better pay. To ensure that our preschool educators have these skills, Preschool for All calls for higher qualification levels than are now required. As currently envisioned, all teachers in Preschool for All classrooms will need a bachelor's degree and a credential/certificate. At the same time, to create the culturally and linguistically familiar environments that young children and their families need, our early education teachers need to more closely match the ethnic and language backgrounds of the families served. To generate such a highly qualified and diverse Preschool for All workforce, state and local First 5 partners will need to take our ongoing professional development efforts to a new level.

Though early childhood educators' education levels and their reflectiveness of the children and families they serve vary from region to region around the state, studies conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment and others show that the early education field as a whole in California faces significant challenges.⁵ An Orange County study conducted by United Way/Success by 6 in 2002 of the qualifications, compensation, demographics, and classroom practice of the county's early education workforce, though not descriptive of conditions in every county, illustrates the kinds of issues we will face as we move ahead. The study, which looked at early care and education salaries and working

conditions in licensed child care centers, found that although 76 percent of the centers served English language learners, fewer than half had someone on staff who could speak the children's home language if called upon. In 85 percent of centers, all classes were taught in English. In a county where nearly half the children are Latino, the early education workforce was 60 percent white, largely female, relatively young, and poorly compensated. While salaries were highest in publicly funded programs, early education workforce salaries in general were very low in relation to the county's high cost of living. In most

cases, workers earned less than the average typist and teachers and other workers in the field gained relatively little in salary over the course of a career, giving them little financial incentive to remain in the field. As might be expected given the low levels of compensation, in more than a third of centers no one on staff had completed an AA degree.

Consistent with state requirements, publicly funded centers in the county had the highest proportion of staff holding California child development permits, but the best-qualified staff in these programs were sometimes lost to better paid positions in elementary schools, and centers reported that their own better-compensated positions were hardest to fill. Publicly funded centers also reported the greatest need for bilingual staff.⁶



This study and others like it highlight the nexus between staff qualifications, pay levels, the ability to provide cultural and linguistic continuity, and the quality of children's learning experiences. Collectively, they underscore the importance of maintaining high standards for education and increasing compensation for early childhood staff of all types while at the same time working hard to increase the cultural and linguistic diversity of the workforce.

Recruiting, training and retaining diverse ECE workers. With support from First 5 California, the Packard Foundation, and others, local First 5 partners are building a base of experience as we scale up workforce development efforts. Working in new and creative ways, they have helped people of all cultural and language backgrounds - whether they come from family day care, unlicensed care, or outside the field altogether - to get onto a clearly defined early education career path and obtain the necessary qualifications to

advance to the next stage. Through academic counseling, job market information and career counseling, financial aid, assistance with child care costs, and other support, First 5-funded training and retention projects have helped low-income or English language learner participants with limited academic training to enroll in and stick with sometimes daunting coursework toward G.E.D.s, Child Development Permits, and other training.

Even when aimed primarily at providers of infant-toddler care rather than at preschool, efforts like these have the effect of creating a more diverse and better educated pool of ECE workers who have the potential to move up in the field over time, eventually obtaining the bachelor's degrees that will be required for employment in Preschool for All programs. In turn, a diverse corps of professionals at the classroom level will eventually help to generate a cadre of ECE program directors, administrators, and policymakers who more closely reflect California's diverse population.

Over the next ten years....

As First 5-funded Preschool for All demonstration projects, county universal preschool projects, and Packard-funded efforts move forward and begin to generate results, they will give us a further understanding of how preschool staffing, practices, and systems can best help young children of all backgrounds and abilities to learn and succeed. At the state level, these findings will help policymakers further refine the content standards, health and safety standards, articulation with K-3, and accountability that will form the framework for Preschool for All, along with the corresponding competencies and certification that early childhood educators will need. In turn, First 5 and higher education partners will be developing the necessary coursework and credentialing programs to meet these requirements, and creating new professional development strategies and career ladders that can accommodate those who are already in the early education field as well as those newly joining from many different backgrounds.

As these efforts progress, we will also be continuing our work to build the broad base of understanding and support statewide that will see us through a multi-year process of gradually improving early childhood educators' qualifications, increasing salaries, and implementing and funding a stable Preschool for All system that is fully integrated with California's K-12 schools. In this way, starting with the children and families who need it most and eventually reaching every child, we will be able ensure that all of our youngest Californians are able to build on diverse strengths for a vibrant future. ■

Child Development Resources at First 5 Clearinghouse



Nutrition, prenatal care, discipline, quality child care and the harmful effects of secondhand smoke are all topics covered in the early childhood development materials available at the First 5 Clearinghouse. Ideal for parents and caregivers of young children, Clearinghouse products are low-cost and easy-to-read. Brochures, posters, videos and tip sheets come in multiple languages. First 5 Clearinghouse products are available to California-based agencies and residents.

First 5 Clearinghouse products can be ordered in three ways:
by phone at 1-800-245-1512;
by fax at 831-439-9184
and online at www.First5Clearinghouse.org.
Call the toll-free line to request a free catalog.



1 "Public Opinion on Child Care and Early Education, California 2001," M. Inkelas, et al, UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, September 2002

2 "What Californians Think about Preschool: A Statewide Survey of Attitudes," conducted for First 5 California by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, January 2004

3 "High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like," L. M. Espinosa, National Institute for Early Education Research, November 2002; "Preschool for All: Step by Step: A Planning Guide and Toolkit," S. Muenchow, American Institutes for Research, 2004

4 Bialystok, E. (1997). Effects of bilingualism on children's emerging concepts of print. *Developmental Psychology*, 33(3), 429-40.

5 See "Two Years in Early Care and Education: A Community Portrait of Quality and Workforce Stability," M. Whitebook, D. Phillips, D. Bellm, N. Crowell, M. Almaraz and J.Y. Jo, Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley, 2004, as well as other Center studies available at www.iir.berkeley.edu/csccce/

6 "Orange County Early Care and Education Salary and Working Conditions Survey," Success by 6/Orange County United Way, 2002

First 5 California - Facts at a Glance

What is the California Children and Families Act? In November 1998, voters passed Proposition 10, an initiative that added a 50 cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs to promote early childhood development, from prenatal to age 5. The California Children and Families Act, which was created through the passage of Prop. 10, was designed to address the lack of public funding and support for early childhood development in the wake of a growing body of scientific evidence indicating the emotional, physical, social and developmental environment to which children are exposed has a profound impact on their ability to reach their greatest potential in school and in life.

How does it work? First 5 California/Children and Families Commission at the state level and California's 58 County Commissions are carrying out the work of the initiative.

First 5 California is the leadership agency and statewide coordinator for the California Children and Families Act. First 5 California provides oversight, training and assistance to the County Commissions and statewide education on the importance of early childhood development. In addition, 20 percent of the overall revenue is administered by First 5 California to conduct research and evaluation on the best policies and practices for young children; to develop education, infrastructure and training programs for parents, child care providers and other professionals; to conduct broad, media-based public education campaigns; and to offer support and technical assistance to County Commissions.

The bulk of the funds, 80 percent, go directly to the County Commissions. The County Commissions must develop strategic plans consistent with First 5 California guidelines on funding local child development programs and services but they also have maximum flexibility in tailoring funding and programs to local needs. Some First 5 California requirements for County Commissions include

obtaining broad public input and submitting audits on spending.

The California Children and Families Act mandates that the State and County Commissions form at least one advisory committee to provide expertise and support. First 5 California has established an Advisory Committee on Diversity, charged with helping to ensure that statewide programs meet the needs of California's ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse population and children with special needs and disabilities.

How are Commissioners chosen? First 5 California's Commission is comprised of seven members appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Rules Committee. The Secretary for Education and the Secretary of the Health and Human Services Agency also serve as ex-officio members. At the local level, each county Board of Supervisors appoints a five to nine member Commission to include a member of the Board of Supervisors and two members from among those who manage county functions (e.g., behavioral health services, social services, or tobacco prevention and treatment services). The remaining members can be drawn from county functions or organizations that work in the early childhood development arena. ■

The California Children and Families Commission has adopted "First 5 California" as its overarching school readiness identity. We believe that the name First 5 California conveys the importance of the first five years of life, the period of time during which a child's brain develops most dramatically. The name will be used in all Commission public education efforts, on any printed materials developed and, over time, may become the primary identity of the organization.

CALIFORNIA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION

Commissioners:

Dr. Alice Walker Duff is co-founder and executive director of Crystal Stairs, Inc. and has worked in the education and child care fields for over three decades. She also serves on the board of the Center for the Child Care Work Force.

Elizabeth Rice Grossman is a retired investment professional committed to philanthropy and children's issues. She serves as a member of the Juvenile Probation Commission in the City and County of San Francisco, is on the Board of Directors for The Omega Boys Club and manages two foundations with her family.

Sandra Gutierrez, an expert in the development of child care services, is currently the California project director for Child Care Programs at The Enterprise Foundation. Previously, she served as project coordinator for the Child Care Law Project.

Eliseo Medina serves as international executive vice president at SEIU and was the first Mexican American elected to a top leadership post. He previously served as president of SEIU's California State Council and as executive director of SEIU Local 2026.

Rob Reiner, a filmmaker and activist for infants and young children, serves as the chair of the Commission after devoting substantial time and resources to the passage of Proposition 10 as part of his crusade to shift the national consciousness to value early childhood development.

Margaret Taylor has served as director of health services for San Mateo County since 1985 and was a founding member of the Medi-Cal managed care plan in San Mateo. She has 30 years of experience working to enhance services for children and families.

Louis A. Vismara, M.D., is a founding member of the M.I.N.D. Institute at UC Davis. The interdisciplinary organization investigates and provides resources for a wide range of neurodevelopment disorders, from autism to learning disabilities. He also serves as a consultant to State Senator John Burton.

Ex-Officio Members:

Richard J. Riordan was appointed California's Secretary for Education on November 3, 2003 – Governor Schwarzenegger's first cabinet appointment. In his capacity, Secretary Riordan is responsible for advising and making policy recommendations to the Governor on education issues. In addition to creating a charitable foundation to teach children to read and write, Riordan was also a founding member of the nationally-acclaimed LEARN school reform effort, and a founding board member for L.A.'s BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow).

Kimberly Belshé, Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, serves as Governor Schwarzenegger's chief advisor on health, social services and rehabilitative policies. As one of the founding members of the First 5 California Children and Families Commission, Ms. Belshé served as vice chairperson and contributed to efforts to improve the oral health of young children.

Staff: Jane I. Henderson, Ph.D., Executive Director Joe P. Munso, Chief Deputy Director

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